

# A MONOTONICITY FORMULA AND A LIOUVILLE-TYPE THEOREM FOR A FOURTH ORDER SUPERCRITICAL PROBLEM

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ABSTRACT. We consider Liouville-type and partial regularity results for the nonlinear fourth-order problem

$$\Delta^2 u = |u|^{p-1}u \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^n,$$

where  $p > 1$  and  $n \geq 1$ . We give a complete classification of stable and finite Morse index solutions (whether positive or sign changing), in the full exponent range. We also compute an upper bound of the Hausdorff dimension of the singular set of extremal solutions. Our approach is motivated by Fleming's tangent cone analysis technique for minimal surfaces and Federer's dimension reduction principle in partial regularity theory. A key tool is the monotonicity formula for biharmonic equations.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We study the following model biharmonic superlinear elliptic equation

$$\Delta^2 u = |u|^{p-1}u \quad \text{in } \Omega, \tag{1.1}$$

where  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n$  is a smoothly bounded domain or the entire space and  $p > 1$  is a real number. Inspired by the tangent cone analysis in minimal surface theory, more precisely Fleming's key observation that the existence of an entire nonplanar minimal graph implies that of a singular area-minimizing cone (see his work on the Bernstein theorem [12]), we derive a monotonicity formula for solutions of (1.1) to reduce the non-existence of nontrivial entire solutions for the problem (1.1), to that of nontrivial homogeneous solutions. Through this approach we give a complete classification of stable solutions and those of finite Morse index, whether positive or sign changing, when  $\Omega = \mathbb{R}^n$  is the whole euclidean space. This in turn enables us to obtain partial regularity as well as an estimate of the Hausdorff dimension of the singular set of the extremal solutions in bounded domains.

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*Key words and phrases.* Monotonicity formula, stable or finite Morse index equations, biharmonic equations, partial regularity.

Let us first describe the monotonicity formula. Equation (1.1) has two important features. It is variational, with energy functional given by

$$\int \frac{1}{2}(\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1}|u|^{p+1}$$

and it is invariant under the scaling transformation

$$u^\lambda(x) = \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(\lambda x).$$

This suggests that the variations of the rescaled energy

$$r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} \frac{1}{2}(\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1}|u|^{p+1}$$

with respect to the scaling parameter  $r$  are meaningful. Augmented by the appropriate boundary terms, the above quantity is in fact non-increasing. More precisely, take  $u \in W_{loc}^{4,2}(\Omega) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\Omega)$ , fix  $x \in \Omega$ , let  $0 < r < R$  be such that  $B_r(x) \subset B_R(x) \subset \Omega$ , and define

$$\begin{aligned} E(r; x, u) := & r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} \frac{1}{2}(\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1}|u|^{p+1} \\ & + \frac{2}{p-1} \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) r^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} u^2 \\ & + \frac{2}{p-1} \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) \frac{d}{dr} \left( r^{\frac{8}{p-1}+2-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} u^2 \right) \\ & + \frac{r^3}{2} \frac{d}{dr} \left[ r^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} r^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \right] \\ & + \frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{dr} \left[ r^{\frac{8}{p-1}+4-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} \left( |\nabla u|^2 - \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right|^2 \right) \right] \\ & + \frac{1}{2} r^{\frac{8}{p-1}+3-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} \left( |\nabla u|^2 - \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right|^2 \right), \end{aligned}$$

where derivatives are taken in the sense of distributions. Then, we have the following monotonicity formula.

**Theorem 1.1.** *Assume that*

$$n \geq 5, \quad p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}. \quad (1.2)$$

*Let  $u \in W_{loc}^{4,2}(\Omega) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\Omega)$  be a weak solution of (1.1). Then,  $E(r; x, u)$  is non-decreasing in  $r \in (0, R)$ . Furthermore there is a constant  $c(n, p) >$*

0 such that

$$\frac{d}{dr}E(r; 0, u) \geq c(n, p)r^{-n+2+\frac{8}{p-1}} \int_{\partial B_r} \left( \frac{4}{p-1}r^{-1}u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2. \quad (1.3)$$

**Remark 1.2.** *Monotonicity formulae have a long history that we will not describe here. Let us simply mention two earlier results that seem closest to our findings: the formula of Pacard [24] for the classical Lane-Emden equation and the one of Chang, Wang and Yang [2] for biharmonic maps.*

Consider again equation (1.1) in the case where  $\Omega = \mathbb{R}^n$ , i.e.,

$$\Delta^2 u = |u|^{p-1}u \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^n. \quad (1.4)$$

Let

$$p_S(n) = \begin{cases} +\infty & \text{if } n \leq 4 \\ \frac{n+4}{n-4} & \text{if } n \geq 5 \end{cases}$$

denote the Sobolev exponent. When  $1 < p \leq p_S(n)$ , all positive solutions to (1.4) are classified: if  $p < p_S(n)$ , then  $u \equiv 0$ ; if  $p = p_S(n)$ , then all solutions can be written in the form  $u = c_n \left( \frac{\lambda}{\lambda^2 + |x - x_0|^2} \right)^{\frac{n-4}{2}}$  for some  $c_n > 0, \lambda > 0, x_0 \in \mathbb{R}^n$ , see the work of Xu and one of the authors [33]. However, there can be many sign-changing solutions to the equation (see the work by Guo, Li and one of the authors [16] for the critical case  $p = p_S(n)$ ).

Here, we allow  $u$  to be sign-changing and  $p$  to be supercritical. Instead, we restrict the analysis to solutions having finite Morse index. More precisely, define the quadratic form

$$\Lambda_u(\phi) := \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\Delta \phi|^2 dx - p \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p-1} \phi^2 dx, \quad \forall \phi \in H^2(\mathbb{R}^n). \quad (1.5)$$

A solution to (1.4) is said to be stable if

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\Delta \phi|^2 dx - p \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p-1} \phi^2 dx \geq 0, \quad \forall \phi \in H^2(\mathbb{R}^n).$$

More generally, the Morse index of a solution is defined as the maximal dimension of all subspaces  $E$  of  $H^2(\mathbb{R}^n)$  such that  $\Lambda_u(\phi) < 0$  in  $E \setminus \{0\}$ . Clearly, a solution is stable if and only if its Morse index is equal to zero. It is also standard knowledge that if a solution to (1.4) has finite Morse index, then there is a compact set  $\mathcal{K} \subset \mathbb{R}^n$  such that

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\Delta \phi|^2 dx - p \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p-1} \phi^2 dx \geq 0, \quad \forall \phi \in H^2(\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \mathcal{K}).$$

Recall that if

$$\gamma = \frac{4}{p-1}, \quad K_0 = \gamma(\gamma+2)(\gamma-n+4)(\gamma-n+2), \quad (1.6)$$

then

$$u_s(r) = K_0^{1/(p-1)} r^{-4/(p-1)} \quad (1.7)$$

is a singular solution to (1.4) in  $\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\}$ . By the Hardy-Rellich inequality with best constant [28]

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\Delta \phi|^2 dx \geq \frac{n^2(n-4)^2}{16} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{\phi^2}{|x|^4} dx, \quad \forall \phi \in H^2(\mathbb{R}^n),$$

the singular solution  $u_s$  is stable if and only if

$$pK_0 \leq \frac{n^2(n-4)^2}{16}. \quad (1.8)$$

Solving the corresponding quartic equation, (1.8) holds if and only if  $p \geq p_c(n)$  where  $p_c(n) > p_S(n)$  is the fourth-order Joseph-Lundgren exponent computed by Gazzola and Grunau [14]:

$$p_c(n) = \begin{cases} +\infty & \text{if } n \leq 12 \\ \frac{n+2 - \sqrt{n^2+4 - n\sqrt{n^2-8n+32}}}{n-6 - \sqrt{n^2+4 - n\sqrt{n^2-8n+32}}} & \text{if } n \geq 13 \end{cases}$$

Equivalently, for fixed  $p > p_S(n)$ , define  $n_p$  to be the smallest dimension such that (1.8) holds. Then,

$$(1.8) \iff p \geq p_c(n) \iff n \geq n_p.$$

The existence, uniqueness and stability of regular radial positive solutions to (1.4) is by now well understood (see the works of Gazzola-Grunau, of Guo and one of the authors, and of Karageorgis [14, 17, 20]): for each  $a > 0$  there exists a unique entire radial positive solution  $u_a(|x|)$  to (1.4) with  $u_a(0) = a$ . This radial positive solution is stable if and only if (1.8) holds.

In our second result, which is a Liouville-type theorem, we give a complete characterization of all finite Morse index solutions (whether radial or not, whether positive or not).

**Theorem 1.3.** *Let  $u$  be solution to (1.4) with finite Morse index.*

- *If  $p \in (1, p_c(n))$ ,  $p \neq p_S(n)$ , then  $u \equiv 0$ ;*
- *If  $p = p_S(n)$ , then  $u$  has finite energy i.e.*

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta u)^2 = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p+1} < +\infty.$$

*If in addition  $u$  is stable, then in fact  $u \equiv 0$ .*

**Remark 1.4.** *According to the preceding discussions, Theorem 1.3 is sharp: on the one hand, in the critical case  $p = p_S(n)$ , Guo, Li and one of the authors [16] have constructed a large class of solutions to (1.1) with finite energy. Since in this case  $\frac{(p-1)n}{4} = p+1$ , by a result of Rozenbljum [29], such solutions have finite Morse index. On the other hand, for  $p \geq p_c(n)$ , all radial solutions are stable (see [17, 20]).*

**Remark 1.5.** *The above theorem generalizes a similar result of Farina [13] for the classical Lane-Emden equation.*

Now consider (1.1) when  $\Omega$  is a smoothly bounded domain of  $\mathbb{R}^n$  and supplement it with Navier boundary conditions:

$$\begin{cases} \Delta^2 u = \lambda(u+1)^p & \text{in } \Omega \\ u = \Delta u = 0 & \text{on } \partial\Omega, \end{cases} \quad (1.9)$$

where  $\lambda > 0$  is a parameter. It is well known that there exists a critical value  $\lambda^* > 0$  depending on  $p$  and  $\Omega$  such that

- If  $\lambda \in (0, \lambda^*)$ , (1.9) has a minimal and classical solution  $u_\lambda$ , which is positive and stable;
- If  $\lambda = \lambda^*$ , a unique weak solution, called the extremal solution  $u_{\lambda^*}$  exists for  $(P_{\lambda^*})$ . It is given as the pointwise limit  $u_{\lambda^*} = \lim_{\lambda \uparrow} u_\lambda$ ;
- No weak solution of (1.9) exists whenever  $\lambda > \lambda^*$ .

An outstanding remaining problem is the regularity of the extremal solution  $u_{\lambda^*}$ . An application of Theorem 1.3 and standard blow-up analysis gives

**Theorem 1.6.** *If  $n < n_p$  (equivalently  $p < p_c(n)$ ), the extremal solution  $u_{\lambda^*}$  is smooth.*

More generally,

**Theorem 1.7.** *Assume  $n < n_p$  (equivalently  $p < p_c(n)$ ).*

- *Let  $\Omega$  be a smoothly bounded domain and  $u \in H_0^1(\Omega) \cap H^2(\Omega)$  be a solution of (1.9) of finite Morse index  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . Then,  $u$  is smooth and there exists a constant  $C > 0$  depending only on  $k, N, \Omega, p$  such that*

$$\|u\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)} \leq C.$$

*In particular, any classical solution satisfies the above inequality.*

- *Let  $\Omega$  be any open set and  $u \in H_0^1(\Omega) \cap H^2(\Omega)$  be a solution of (1.1). Then, there exists a constant  $C > 0$  depending only on*

$k, N, \Omega, p$  such that for every  $i \leq 3$ ,

$$|\nabla^i u| \leq C \text{dist}(x, \partial\Omega)^{-\frac{4}{p-1}-i} \quad \text{a.e. in } \Omega$$

The first part of the above theorem is again sharp since the singular solution defined by (1.7), (1.6) is stable whenever  $n \geq n_p$ . For such dimensions, one can still try to estimate the size of the singular set of solutions.

**Definition 1.8.** *A point  $x$  belongs to the regular set of a function  $u \in L^1_{loc}(\Omega)$  if there exists a neighborhood  $B$  of  $x$  such that  $u \in L^\infty(B)$ . Otherwise,  $x$  belongs to  $\mathcal{S}$ , the singular set of  $u$ .*

By definition, the regular set is an open set. By elliptic estimates applied to (1.1),  $u$  is smooth in its regular set. Now, we state the interior partial regularity for  $u_{\lambda^*}$ .

**Theorem 1.9.** *Let  $n \geq n_p$  and let  $u_{\lambda^*}$  be the extremal solution to (1.9). Then the Hausdorff dimension of its singular set  $\mathcal{S}$  is no more than  $n - n_p$ . Moreover, when  $n = n_p$ ,  $\mathcal{S}$  is a discrete set.*

We now list some known results. We start with the analogous second order equation

$$\Delta u + |u|^{p-1}u = 0, \text{ in } \mathbb{R}^n. \quad (1.10)$$

As mentioned earlier, Farina completely classified finite Morse index solutions (positive or sign-changing) in his seminal paper [13]. His proof makes a delicate use of the classical Moser iteration method. More precisely, if one multiplies the equation (1.10) by a power of  $u$ , say  $u^q$ ,  $q > 1$ , Moser's iteration works because of the following simple identity

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^q (-\Delta u) = \frac{4q}{(q+1)^2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u^{\frac{q+1}{2}}|^2, \quad \forall u \in C_0^1(\mathbb{R}^n).$$

There have been many attempts to generalize Moser's iteration technique (or Farina's approach) to fourth order problems like (1.1). Unfortunately, this runs into problems: the corresponding identity reads

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^q (\Delta^2 u) = \frac{4q}{(q+1)^2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\Delta u^{\frac{q+1}{2}}|^2 - q(q-1)^2 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^{q-3} |\nabla u|^4, \quad \forall u \in C_0^2(\mathbb{R}^n)$$

and the additional term  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^{q-3} |\nabla u|^4$  makes the Moser iteration argument difficult to use.

Another strategy is to use the test function  $v = -\Delta u$ . This allows to treat exponents less than  $\frac{n}{n-8} + \epsilon_n$  for some  $\epsilon_n > 0$ , see the works of Cowan-Ghoussoub-Esposito [3] and Ye and one of the authors [35].

Another approach, obtained by Cowan and Ghoussoub<sup>1</sup>[4], and further exploited by Hajlaoui, Harrabi and Ye [19], is to derive the following interesting interpolated version of the inequality: for stable solutions to (1.1), there holds

$$\sqrt{p} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{\frac{p-1}{2}} \phi^2 \leq \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla \phi|^2, \quad \forall \phi \in C_0^1(\mathbb{R}^n).$$

This approach improves the first upper bound  $\frac{n}{n-8} + \epsilon_n$ , but it again fails to catch the optimal exponent  $p_c(n)$  (when  $n \geq 13$ ). It should be remarked that by combining these two approaches one can show that stable positive solutions to (1.1) do not exist when  $n \leq 12$  and  $p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ , see [19].

In the above references, only positive solutions to (1.1) are considered. One reason is their use of the following inequality, due to Souplet ([32])

$$\Delta u + \frac{2}{p+1} u^{\frac{p+1}{2}} \leq 0 \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^n. \quad (1.11)$$

As observed in [11] for a similar equation, the use of the above inequality can be completely avoided.

In this paper we take a completely new approach, which also avoids the use of (1.11) and requires minimal integrability. One of our motivations is Fleming's proof of the Bernstein theorem for minimal surfaces in dimension 3. Fleming used a monotonicity formula for minimal surfaces together with a compactness result to blow down the minimal surface. It turns out that the blow-down limit is a minimal cone. This is because the monotonic quantity is constant only for minimizing cones. Then, he proved that minimizing cones are flat, which implies in turn the flatness of the original minimal surface.

At last, let us sketch the proof of Theorem 1.3: we first derive a monotonicity formula for our equation (1.1). Then, we classify stable solutions: this is Theorem 4.1 in Section 4. To do this, we estimate solutions in the  $L^{p+1}$  norm, utilizing the afore-mentioned methods available in the litterature, and then show that the *blow-down* limit  $u^\infty(x) = \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow \infty} \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(\lambda x)$  satisfies  $E(r) \equiv \text{const.}$  Then, Theorem 1.1 implies that  $u^\infty$  is a homogeneous stable solution, and we show in Theorem 3.1 that such solutions are trivial if  $p < p_c(n)$ . Then similar to Fleming's proof, the triviality of the *blow-down* limit implies that the original entire solution is also trivial. Finally, we extend our result to solutions of finite Morse index.

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<sup>1</sup>a similar method was first announced in [9], and later published in the work by Farina-Sirakov and one of the authors [10].

**Acknowledgment.** L. Dupaigne thanks J. Wei and the math department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (where part of this work was done) for their warm hospitality. Kelei Wang is partially supported by the Joint Laboratory of CAS-Croucher in Nonlinear PDE. Juncheng Wei was supported by a GRF grant from RGC of Hong Kong. J. Dávila acknowledges support of Fondecyt 1090167, CAPDE-Anillo ACT-125 and Fondo Basal CMM.

## 2. PROOF OF THE MONOTONICITY FORMULA

In this section we derive a monotonicity formula for functions  $u \in W^{4,2}(B_R(0)) \cap L^{p+1}(B_R(0))$  solving (1.1) in  $B_R(0) \subset \Omega$ . We assume that  $p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ .

*Proof of Theorem 1.1.* Since the boundary integrals in  $E(r; x, u)$  only involve second order derivatives of  $u$ , the boundary integrals in  $\frac{dE}{dr}(r; x, u)$  only involve third order derivatives of  $u$ . By our assumption  $u \in W^{4,2}(B_R(0)) \cap L^{p+1}(B_R(0))$ , for each  $B_r(x) \subset B_R(0)$ ,  $u \in W^{3,2}(\partial B_r(x))$ . Thus, the following calculations can be rigorously verified. Assume that  $x = 0$  and that the balls  $B_\lambda$  are all centered at 0. Take

$$\tilde{E}(\lambda) := \lambda^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_\lambda} \frac{1}{2}(\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1}|u|^{p+1}.$$

Define

$$v := \Delta u$$

and

$$u^\lambda(x) := \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(\lambda x), \quad v^\lambda(x) := \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}+2} v(\lambda x).$$

We still have  $v^\lambda = \Delta u^\lambda$ ,  $\Delta v^\lambda = (u^\lambda)^p$ , and by differentiating in  $\lambda$ ,

$$\Delta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} = \frac{dv^\lambda}{d\lambda}.$$

Note that differentiation in  $\lambda$  commutes with differentiation and integration in  $x$ . A rescaling shows

$$\tilde{E}(\lambda) = \int_{B_1} \frac{1}{2}(v^\lambda)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1}|u^\lambda|^{p+1}.$$

Hence

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \tilde{E}(\lambda) &= \int_{B_1} v^\lambda \frac{dv^\lambda}{d\lambda} - (u^\lambda)^p \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \\ &= \int_{B_1} v^\lambda \Delta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \Delta v^\lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \end{aligned} \tag{2.1}$$



$$= \int_{\partial B_1} v^\lambda \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \frac{\partial v^\lambda}{\partial r} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}.$$

In what follows, we express all derivatives of  $u^\lambda$  in the  $r = |x|$  variable in terms of derivatives in the  $\lambda$  variable. In the definition of  $u^\lambda$  and  $v^\lambda$ , directly differentiating in  $\lambda$  gives

$$\frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}(x) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} u^\lambda(x) + r \frac{\partial u^\lambda}{\partial r}(x) \right), \quad (2.2)$$

$$\frac{dv^\lambda}{d\lambda}(x) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \left( \frac{2(p+1)}{p-1} v^\lambda(x) + r \frac{\partial v^\lambda}{\partial r}(x) \right). \quad (2.3)$$

In (2.2), taking derivatives in  $\lambda$  once again, we get

$$\lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2}(x) + \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}(x) = \frac{4}{p-1} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}(x) + r \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}(x). \quad (2.4)$$

Substituting (2.3) and (2.4) into (2.1) we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{d\tilde{E}}{d\lambda} &= \int_{\partial B_1} v^\lambda \left( \lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \frac{p-5}{p-1} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right) - \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \left( \lambda \frac{dv^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \frac{2(p+1)}{p-1} v^\lambda \right) \\ &= \int_{\partial B_1} \lambda v^\lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + 3v^\lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \frac{dv^\lambda}{d\lambda}. \end{aligned} \quad (2.5)$$

Observe that  $v^\lambda$  is expressed as a combination of  $x$  derivatives of  $u^\lambda$ . So we also transform  $v^\lambda$  into  $\lambda$  derivatives of  $u^\lambda$ . By taking derivatives in  $r$  in (2.2) and noting (2.4), we get on  $\partial B_1$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial^2 u^\lambda}{\partial r^2} &= \lambda \frac{\partial}{\partial r} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \frac{p+3}{p-1} \frac{\partial u^\lambda}{\partial r} \\ &= \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \frac{p-5}{p-1} \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \frac{p+3}{p-1} \left( \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \frac{4}{p-1} u^\lambda \right) \\ &= \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} - \frac{8}{p-1} \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \frac{4(p+3)}{(p-1)^2} u^\lambda. \end{aligned}$$

Then on  $\partial B_1$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} v^\lambda &= \frac{\partial^2 u^\lambda}{\partial r^2} + \frac{n-1}{r} \frac{\partial u^\lambda}{\partial r} + \frac{1}{r^2} \Delta_\theta u^\lambda \\ &= \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} - \frac{8}{p-1} \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \frac{4(p+3)}{(p-1)^2} u^\lambda + (n-1) \left( \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \frac{4}{p-1} u^\lambda \right) + \Delta_\theta u^\lambda \\ &= \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \left( n-1 - \frac{8}{p-1} \right) \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \frac{4}{p-1} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} - n+2 \right) u^\lambda + \Delta_\theta u^\lambda. \end{aligned}$$

Here  $\Delta_\theta$  is the Beltrami-Laplace operator on  $\partial B_1$  and below  $\nabla_\theta$  represents the tangential derivative on  $\partial B_1$ . For notational convenience, we also define the constants

$$\alpha = n - 1 - \frac{8}{p-1}, \quad \beta = \frac{4}{p-1} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} - n + 2 \right).$$

Now (2.6) reads

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \tilde{E}(\lambda) &= \int_{\partial B_1} \lambda \left( \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \alpha \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \beta u^\lambda \right) \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \\ &\quad + 3 \left( \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \alpha \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \beta u^\lambda \right) \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \\ &\quad - \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \alpha \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \beta u^\lambda \right) \\ &\quad + \int_{\partial B_1} \lambda \Delta_\theta u^\lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + 3 \Delta_\theta u^\lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} - \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \Delta_\theta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \\ &= R_1 + R_2. \end{aligned}$$

Integrating by parts on  $\partial B_1$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned} R_2 &= \int_{\partial B_1} -\lambda \nabla_\theta u^\lambda \nabla_\theta \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} - 3 \nabla_\theta u^\lambda \nabla_\theta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \lambda |\nabla_\theta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}|^2 \\ &= -\frac{\lambda}{2} \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left( \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) - \frac{3}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) + 2\lambda \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}|^2 \\ &= -\frac{1}{2} \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left( \lambda \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) + 2\lambda \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda}|^2 \\ &\geq -\frac{1}{2} \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left( \lambda \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right). \end{aligned}$$

For  $R_1$ , after some simplifications we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} R_1 &= \int_{\partial B_1} \lambda \left( \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \alpha \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \beta u^\lambda \right) \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \\ &\quad + 3 \left( \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \alpha \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \beta u^\lambda \right) \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \\ &\quad - \lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \left( \lambda^2 \frac{d^3 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^3} + (2 + \alpha) \lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + (\alpha + \beta) \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right) \\ &= \int_{\partial B_1} \lambda^3 \left( \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \right)^2 + \lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + \beta \lambda u^\lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + 3\beta u^\lambda \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
& + (2\alpha - \beta)\lambda \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 - \lambda^3 \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \frac{d^3 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^3} \\
& = \int_{\partial B_1} 2\lambda^3 \left( \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \right)^2 + 4\lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + (2\alpha - 2\beta)\lambda \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 \\
& \quad + \frac{\beta}{2} \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left[ \lambda (u^\lambda)^2 \right] - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left[ \lambda^3 \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 \right] + \frac{\beta}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} (u^\lambda)^2.
\end{aligned}$$

Here we have used the relations

$$\lambda f f'' = \left( \frac{\lambda}{2} f^2 \right)'' - 2f f' - \lambda (f')^2,$$

and

$$-\lambda^3 f' f''' = - \left[ \frac{\lambda^3}{2} ((f')^2)' \right]' + 3\lambda^2 f' f'' + \lambda^3 (f'')^2.$$

Since  $p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ , direct calculations show that

$$\alpha - \beta = \left( n - 1 - \frac{8}{p-1} \right) - \frac{4}{p-1} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} - n + 2 \right) > 1. \quad (2.6)$$

Thus,

$$\begin{aligned}
& 2\lambda^3 \left( \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \right)^2 + 4\lambda^2 \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} + (2\alpha - 2\beta)\lambda \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 \quad (2.7) \\
& = 2\lambda \left( \lambda \frac{d^2 u^\lambda}{d\lambda^2} + \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 + (2\alpha - 2\beta - 2)\lambda \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 \\
& \geq 0.
\end{aligned}$$

Then,

$$R_1 \geq \int_{\partial B_1} \frac{\beta}{2} \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left[ \lambda (u^\lambda)^2 \right] - \frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left[ \lambda^3 \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 \right] + \frac{\beta}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} (u^\lambda)^2.$$

Now, rescaling back, we can write those  $\lambda$  derivatives in  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  as follows.

$$\begin{aligned}
& \int_{\partial B_1} \frac{d}{d\lambda} (u^\lambda)^2 = \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} u^2 \right). \\
& \int_{\partial B_1} \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left[ \lambda (u^\lambda)^2 \right] = \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left( \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+2-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} u^2 \right). \\
& \int_{\partial B_1} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left[ \lambda^3 \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \frac{du^\lambda}{d\lambda} \right)^2 \right] = \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left[ \lambda^3 \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} \lambda^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \right) \right]. \\
& \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left( \lambda \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) = \frac{d^2}{d\lambda^2} \left[ \lambda^{1+\frac{8}{p-1}+2+1-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} \left( |\nabla u|^2 - \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right|^2 \right) \right].
\end{aligned}$$

$$\frac{d}{d\lambda} \left( \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_\theta u^\lambda|^2 \right) = \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left[ \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+2+1-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} \left( |\nabla u|^2 - \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right|^2 \right) \right]$$

Substituting these into  $\frac{d}{d\lambda} E(\lambda; 0, u)$  we finish the proof.  $\square$

Denote  $c(n, p) = 2\alpha - 2\beta - 2 > 0$ . By (2.7), we have

**Corollary 2.1.**

$$\frac{d}{dr} E(r; 0, u) \geq c(n, p) r^{-n+2+\frac{8}{p-1}} \int_{\partial B_r} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} r^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2.$$

In particular, if  $E(\lambda; 0, u) \equiv \text{const.}$  for all  $\lambda \in (r, R)$ ,  $u$  is homogeneous in  $B_R \setminus B_r$ :

$$u(x) = |x|^{-\frac{4}{p-1}} u \left( \frac{x}{|x|} \right).$$

We end this section with the following observation : in the above computations we just need the inequality (2.6) to hold. In particular the formula can be easily extended to biharmonic equations with negative exponents. We state the following monotonicity formula for solutions of

$$\Delta^2 u = -\frac{1}{u^p}, \quad u > 0 \text{ in } \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n. \quad (2.8)$$

**Lemma 2.2.** Assume that  $p$  satisfies

$$n - 2 + \frac{8}{p+1} > \frac{4}{p+1} \left( \frac{4}{p+1} + n - 2 \right) \quad (2.9)$$

Let  $u$  be a classical solution to (2.8) in  $B_r(x) \subset B_R(x) \subset \Omega$ . Then the following quantity

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{E}(r; x, u) &:= r^{4\frac{p-1}{p+1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} \frac{1}{2} (\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p-1} u^{1-p} \\ &\quad - \frac{2}{p+1} \left( n - 2 + \frac{4}{p+1} \right) r^{-\frac{8}{p+1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} u^2 \\ &\quad - \frac{2}{p+1} \left( n - 2 + \frac{4}{p+1} \right) \frac{d}{dr} \left( r^{-\frac{8}{p+1}+2-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} u^2 \right) \\ &\quad + \frac{r^3}{2} \frac{d}{dr} \left[ r^{-\frac{8}{p+1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} \left( -\frac{4}{p+1} r^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \right] \\ &\quad + \frac{1}{2} \frac{d}{dr} \left[ r^{-\frac{8}{p+1}+4-n} \int_{\partial B_r(x)} \left( |\nabla u|^2 - \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right|^2 \right) \right] \end{aligned}$$

$$+\frac{1}{2}r^{-\frac{8}{p+1}+3-n}\int_{\partial B_r(x)}\left(|\nabla u|^2-|\frac{\partial u}{\partial r}|^2\right)$$

is increasing in  $r$ . Furthermore there exists  $c_0 > 0$  such that

$$\frac{d}{dr}E(r; 0, u) \geq c_0 r^{-n+2-\frac{8}{p+1}} \int_{\partial B_r} \left( -\frac{4}{p+1} r^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2. \quad (2.10)$$

In the rest of the paper, sometimes we use  $E(r; x)$  or  $E(r)$  if no confusion occurs.

### 3. HOMOGENEOUS SOLUTIONS

For the applications below, we give a non-existence result for homogeneous stable solution of (1.1). (This corresponds to the tangent cone analysis of Fleming.) By the Hardy-Rellich inequality, this result is sharp.

**Theorem 3.1.** *Let  $u \in W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\})$  be a homogeneous, stable solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\}$ , for  $p \in (\frac{n+4}{n-4}, p_c(n))$ . Assume that  $|u|^{p+1} \in L_{loc}^1(\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\})$ . Then  $u \equiv 0$ .*

*Proof.* There exists a  $w \in W^{2,2}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1})$  such that in polar coordinates

$$u(r, \theta) = r^{-\frac{4}{p-1}} w(\theta).$$

Since  $u \in W^{2,2}(B_2 \setminus B_1) \cap L^{p+1}(B_2 \setminus B_1)$ ,  $w \in W^{2,2}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1}) \cap L^{p+1}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1})$ .

Direct calculations show that  $w$  satisfies (in  $W^{2,2}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1})$  sense)

$$\Delta_\theta^2 w - J_1 \Delta_\theta w + J_2 w = w^p, \quad (3.1)$$

where

$$J_1 = \left( \frac{4}{p-1} + 2 \right) \left( n - 4 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) + \frac{4}{p-1} \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right),$$

$$J_2 = \frac{4}{p-1} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} + 2 \right) \left( n - 4 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right).$$

Because  $w \in W^{2,2}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1})$ , we can test (3.1) with  $w$ , and we get

$$\int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |\Delta_\theta w|^2 + J_1 |\nabla_\theta w|^2 + J_2 w^2 = \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |w|^{p+1}. \quad (3.2)$$

For any  $\varepsilon > 0$ , choose an  $\eta_\varepsilon \in C_0^\infty((\frac{\varepsilon}{2}, \frac{2}{\varepsilon}))$ , such that  $\eta_\varepsilon \equiv 1$  in  $(\varepsilon, \frac{1}{\varepsilon})$ , and

$$r|\eta'_\varepsilon(r)| + r^2|\eta''_\varepsilon(r)| \leq 64 \text{ for all } r > 0.$$

Because  $w \in W^{2,2}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1}) \cap L^{p+1}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1})$ ,  $r^{-\frac{n-4}{2}} w(\theta) \eta_\varepsilon(r)$  can be approximated by  $C_0^\infty(B_{4/\varepsilon} \setminus B_{\varepsilon/4})$  functions in  $W^{2,2}(B_{2/\varepsilon} \setminus B_{\varepsilon/2}) \cap L^{p+1}(B_{2/\varepsilon} \setminus$

$B_{\varepsilon/2}$ ). Hence in the stability condition for  $u$  we are allowed to choose a test function of the form  $r^{-\frac{n-4}{2}}w(\theta)\eta_\varepsilon(r)$ . Note that

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta \left( r^{-\frac{n-4}{2}} w(\theta) \eta_\varepsilon(r) \right) &= -\frac{n(n-4)}{4} r^{-\frac{n}{2}} \eta_\varepsilon(r) w(\theta) + r^{-\frac{n}{2}} \eta_\varepsilon(r) \Delta_\theta w(\theta) \\ &\quad - 3r^{-\frac{n}{2}+1} \eta'_\varepsilon(r) w(\theta) + r^{-\frac{n}{2}+2} \eta''_\varepsilon(r) w(\theta). \end{aligned}$$

Substituting this into the stability condition for  $u$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned} & p \left( \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |w|^{p+1} d\theta \right) \left( \int_0^{+\infty} r^{-1} \eta_\varepsilon(r)^2 dr \right) \\ & \leq \left( \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} \left( |\Delta_\theta w|^2 + \frac{n(n-4)}{2} |\nabla_\theta w|^2 + \frac{n^2(n-4)^2}{16} w^2 \right) d\theta \right) \left( \int_0^{+\infty} r^{-1} \eta_\varepsilon(r)^2 dr \right) \\ & \quad + O \left[ \left( \int_0^{+\infty} r \eta'_\varepsilon(r)^2 + r^3 \eta''_\varepsilon(r)^2 + r^2 |\eta'_\varepsilon(r)| |\eta_\varepsilon(r)| + r \eta_\varepsilon(r) |\eta''_\varepsilon(r)| dr \right) \right. \\ & \quad \left. \times \left( \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} w(\theta)^2 + |\nabla_\theta w(\theta)|^2 d\theta \right) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

Note that

$$\int_0^{+\infty} r^{-1} \eta_\varepsilon(r)^2 dr \geq |\log \varepsilon|,$$

$$\int_0^{+\infty} r \eta'_\varepsilon(r)^2 + r^3 \eta''_\varepsilon(r)^2 + r^2 |\eta'_\varepsilon(r)| |\eta_\varepsilon(r)| + r \eta_\varepsilon(r) |\eta''_\varepsilon(r)| dr \leq C,$$

for some constant  $C$  independent of  $\varepsilon$ . By letting  $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$ , we obtain

$$p \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |w|^{p+1} d\theta \leq \int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} |\Delta_\theta w|^2 + \frac{n(n-4)}{2} |\nabla_\theta w|^2 + \frac{n^2(n-4)^2}{16} w^2.$$

Substituting (3.2) into this we get

$$\int_{\mathbb{S}^{n-1}} (p-1) |\Delta_\theta w|^2 + (pJ_1 - \frac{n(n-4)}{2}) |\nabla_\theta w|^2 + (pJ_2 - \frac{n^2(n-4)^2}{16}) w^2 \leq 0.$$

If  $\frac{n+4}{n-4} < p < p_c(n)$ , then  $p-1 > 0$ ,  $pJ_1 - \frac{n(n-4)}{2} > 0$  and  $pJ_2 - \frac{n^2(n-4)^2}{16} > 0$  (cf. p. 338 in [18]), so  $w \equiv 0$  and then  $u \equiv 0$ .  $\square$

For applications in Section 6, we record the form of  $E(R; 0, u)$  for a homogeneous solution  $u$ .

**Remark 3.2.** Suppose  $u(r, \theta) = r^{-\frac{4}{p-1}} w(\theta)$  is a homogeneous solution, where  $p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}$  and  $w \in W^{2,2}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1}) \cap L^{p+1}(\mathbb{S}^{n-1})$ . In this case, for any  $r > 0$ ,

$$\int_{B_r \setminus B_{r/2}} |\Delta u|^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq cr^{n-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}}.$$

Because  $n - 4\frac{p+1}{p-1} < 0$ , by choosing  $r = 2^{-i}R$  and summing in  $i$  from 1 to  $+\infty$ , we see

$$\int_{B_R} |\Delta u|^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq cR^{n-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}},$$

which converges to 0 as  $R \rightarrow 0$ . Hence for any  $R > 0$ ,  $E(R; 0, u)$  is well-defined and by the homogeneity, it equals  $E(1; 0, u)$ . By definition

$$\begin{aligned} E(1; 0, u) &= \int_{B_1} \frac{1}{2} (\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1} |u|^{p+1} \\ &\quad + \frac{4}{p-1} \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) \int_{\partial B_1} u^2 + \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_{\theta} u|^2 \\ &= \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{p+1} \right) \int_{B_1} |u|^{p+1} + \frac{1}{2} \int_{\partial B_1} \left( \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \Delta u - u \frac{\partial \Delta u}{\partial r} \right) \\ &\quad + \frac{4}{p-1} \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) \int_{\partial B_1} u^2 + \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_{\theta} u|^2. \end{aligned}$$

By noting that

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} &= -\frac{4}{p-1} r^{-1} u, \quad \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial r^2} = \frac{4}{p-1} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} + 1 \right) r^{-2} u, \\ \frac{\partial \Delta u}{\partial r} &= -\left( 2 + \frac{4}{p-1} \right) r^{-1} \Delta u, \quad \Delta u = \frac{4}{p-1} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} + 2 - n \right) r^{-2} u + r^{-2} \Delta_{\theta} u, \end{aligned}$$

we get

$$E(1; 0, u) = \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{p+1} \right) \int_{B_1} |u|^{p+1} = \frac{1}{n - 4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{p+1} \right) \int_{\partial B_1} |w|^{p+1}.$$

Replacing  $|u|^{p+1}$  by  $(\Delta u)^2$ , we also have

$$\begin{aligned} E(1; 0, u) &= \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{p+1} \right) \int_{B_1} (\Delta u)^2 + \frac{p-1}{p+1} \int_{\partial B_1} |\nabla_{\theta} u|^2 \\ &\quad + \frac{4}{p+1} \left( n - 2 - \frac{4}{p-1} \right) \int_{\partial B_1} u^2. \end{aligned}$$

#### 4. THE BLOW DOWN ANALYSIS

In this section we use the blow-down analysis to prove the Liouville theorem for stable solutions. Throughout this section  $u$  always denotes a smooth stable solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

**Theorem 4.1.** *Let  $u$  be a smooth stable solution of (1.1) on  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . If  $1 < p < p_c(n)$ , then  $u \equiv 0$ .*

The following lemma appears in [35] for positive solution. It remains valid for sign-changing solutions, see also [19].

**Lemma 4.2.** *Let  $u$  be a smooth stable solution of (1.1) and let  $v = \Delta u$ . Then for some  $C$  we have*

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (v^2 + |u|^{p+1})\eta^2 &\leq C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^2 (|\nabla(\Delta\eta) \cdot \nabla\eta| + (\Delta\eta)^2 + |\Delta(|\nabla\eta|^2)|) dx \\ &\quad + C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |uv||\nabla\eta|^2 dx \end{aligned} \quad (4.1)$$

for all  $\eta \in C_0^\infty(\mathbb{R}^n)$ .

*Proof.* For completeness we give the proof. We have the identity

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta^2 \xi) \xi \eta^2 dx &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta(\xi\eta))^2 + \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (-4(\nabla\xi \cdot \nabla\eta)^2 + 2\xi\Delta\xi|\nabla\eta|^2) dx \\ &\quad + \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \xi^2 (2\nabla(\Delta\eta) \cdot \nabla\eta + (\Delta\eta)^2) dx, \end{aligned}$$

for  $\xi \in C^4(\mathbb{R}^n)$  and  $\eta \in C_0^\infty(\mathbb{R}^n)$ , see for example Lemma 2.3 in [35].

Taking  $\xi = u$  yields

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p+1} \eta^2 dx &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta(u\eta))^2 + \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (-4(\nabla u \cdot \nabla\eta)^2 + 2uv|\nabla\eta|^2) dx \\ &\quad + \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^2 (2\nabla(\Delta\eta) \cdot \nabla\eta + (\Delta\eta)^2) dx, \end{aligned}$$

Using the stability inequality with  $u\eta$  yields

$$p \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p+1} \eta^2 dx \leq \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta(u\eta))^2.$$

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (|u|^{p+1} \eta^2 + (\Delta(u\eta))^2) dx &\leq C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (|\nabla u|^2 |\nabla\eta|^2 + |uv||\nabla\eta|^2) dx \\ &\quad + C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^2 (|\nabla(\Delta\eta) \cdot \nabla\eta| + (\Delta\eta)^2) dx. \end{aligned}$$

Using  $\Delta(\eta u) = v\eta + 2\nabla\eta \cdot \nabla u + \eta\Delta u$  we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (|u|^{p+1} + v^2) \eta^2 dx &\leq C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (|\nabla u|^2 |\nabla\eta|^2 + |uv||\nabla\eta|^2) dx \\ &\quad + C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^2 (|\nabla(\Delta\eta) \cdot \nabla\eta| + (\Delta\eta)^2) dx. \end{aligned}$$

But

$$2 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |\nabla u|^2 |\nabla\eta|^2 dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \Delta(u^2) |\nabla\eta|^2 dx - 2 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} uv |\nabla\eta|^2 dx$$



$$= \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^2 \Delta(|\nabla \eta|^2) dx - 2 \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} uv |\nabla \eta|^2 dx,$$

and hence

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (|u|^{p+1} + v^2) \eta^2 dx &\leq C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} u^2 (|\nabla(\Delta \eta) \cdot \nabla \eta| + (\Delta \eta)^2 + |\Delta(|\nabla \eta|^2)|) dx \\ &\quad + C \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |uv| |\nabla \eta|^2 dx. \end{aligned}$$

This proves (4.1) □

**Corollary 4.3.** *There exists a constant  $C$  such that*

$$\int_{B_R(x)} v^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq CR^{-4} \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} u^2 + CR^{-2} \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |uv|, \quad (4.2)$$

and

$$\int_{B_R(x)} v^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq CR^{n-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}}. \quad (4.3)$$

for all  $B_R(x)$ .

*Proof.* The first inequality is a direct consequence of (4.1), by choosing a cut-off function  $\eta \in C_0^\infty(B_{2R}(x))$ , such that  $\eta \equiv 1$  in  $B_R(x)$ , and for  $k \leq 3$ ,  $|\nabla^k \eta| \leq \frac{1000}{R^k}$ .

Exactly the same argument as in [35] or [19] provides the second estimate. For completeness, we record the proof here. Replacing  $\eta$  in (4.1) by  $\eta^m$ , where  $m$  is a larger integer and  $\eta$  is a cut-off function as before. Then

$$\begin{aligned} \int |uv| |\nabla \eta^m|^2 &= m^2 \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |uv| \eta^{2m-2} |\nabla \eta|^2 \\ &\leq \frac{1}{2C} \int v^2 \eta^{2m} + C \int u^2 \eta^{2m-4} |\nabla \eta|^4. \end{aligned}$$

Substituting this into (4.1), we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \int (v^2 + |u|^{p+1}) \eta^{2m} &\leq CR^{-4} \int_{B_{2R}(x)} u^2 \eta^{2m-4} \\ &\leq CR^{-4} \left( \int_{B_{2R}(x)} |u|^{p+1} \eta^{(m-2)(p+1)} \right)^{\frac{2}{p+1}} R^{n(1-\frac{2}{p+1})} \\ &\leq CR^{-4} \left( \int_{B_{2R}(x)} |u|^{p+1} \eta^{(m-2)(p+1)} \right)^{\frac{2}{p+1}} R^{n(1-\frac{2}{p+1})}. \end{aligned}$$

This gives (4.3). Here we have used the fact  $\eta^{2m} \geq \eta^{(m-2)(p+1)}$  because  $0 \leq \eta \leq 1$  and  $m$  is large. □

*Proof of Theorem 4.1 for  $1 < p \leq \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ .* For  $p < \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ , we can let  $R \rightarrow +\infty$  in (4.3) to get  $u \equiv 0$  directly. If  $p = \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ , this gives

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} v^2 + |u|^{p+1} < +\infty.$$

So

$$\lim_{R \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} v^2 + |u|^{p+1} = 0.$$

Then by (4.2), and noting that now  $n = 4\frac{p+1}{p-1}$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{B_R(x)} v^2 + |u|^{p+1} &\leq CR^{-4} \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} u^2 + C \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |v|^2 \\ &\leq CR^{-4} \left( \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |u|^{p+1} \right)^{\frac{2}{p+1}} R^{n(1-\frac{2}{p+1})} + C \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |v|^2 \\ &\leq C \left( \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |u|^{p+1} \right)^{\frac{2}{p+1}} + C \int_{B_{2R}(x) \setminus B_R(x)} |v|^2. \end{aligned}$$

This goes to 0 as  $R \rightarrow +\infty$ , and we still get  $u \equiv 0$ .  $\square$

Next we concentrate on the case  $p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ . We first use (4.3) to show

**Lemma 4.4.**  $\lim_{r \rightarrow +\infty} E(r; 0, u) < +\infty$ .

*Proof.* Since  $E(r)$  is non-decreasing in  $r$ , we have

$$E(r) \leq \frac{1}{r} \int_r^{2r} E(t) dt \leq \frac{1}{r^2} \int_r^{2r} \int_t^{t+r} E(\lambda) d\lambda dt.$$

By (4.3),

$$\frac{1}{r^2} \int_r^{2r} \int_t^{t+r} \left( \lambda^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_\lambda} \frac{1}{2} (\Delta u)^2 - \frac{1}{p+1} |u|^{p+1} \right) d\lambda dt \leq C.$$

Next

$$\begin{aligned} &\frac{1}{r^2} \int_r^{2r} \int_t^{t+r} \left( \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} u^2 \right) d\lambda dt \\ &= \frac{1}{r^2} \int_r^{2r} \int_{B_{t+r} \setminus B_t} |x|^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} u(x)^2 dx dt \\ &\leq \frac{1}{r^2} \int_r^{2r} \left( \int_{B_{3r} \setminus B_r} |x|^{\left(\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n\right)\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \right)^{\frac{p-1}{p+1}} \left( \int_{B_{3r}} |u(x)|^{p+1} \right)^{\frac{2}{p+1}} dt \\ &\leq C. \end{aligned}$$

The same estimate holds for the term in  $E(r)$  containing

$$\int_{\partial B_\lambda} \left( |\nabla u|^2 - \left| \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right|^2 \right).$$

For this we need to note the following estimate

$$\int_{B_r} |\nabla u|^2 \leq Cr^2 \int_{B_{2r}} (\Delta u)^2 + Cr^{-2+n\frac{p-1}{p+1}} \left( \int_{B_{2r}} |u|^{p+1} \right)^{\frac{2}{p+1}} \leq Cr^{n-\frac{8}{p-1}-2}.$$

Now consider

$$\begin{aligned} & \frac{1}{r^2} \int_r^{2r} \int_t^{t+r} \frac{\lambda^3}{2} \frac{d}{d\lambda} \left[ \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} \lambda^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \right] d\lambda dt \\ &= \frac{1}{2r^2} \int_r^{2r} \left\{ (t+r)^{\frac{8}{p-1}+4-n} \int_{\partial B_{t+r}} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} (t+r)^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \right. \\ & \quad \left. - t^{\frac{8}{p-1}+4-n} \int_{\partial B_t} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} t^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \right\} dt \\ & \quad - \frac{3}{2r^2} \int_r^{2r} \int_t^{t+r} \lambda^{\frac{8}{p-1}+3-n} \int_{\partial B_\lambda} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} \lambda^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 d\lambda dt \\ &\leq \frac{C}{r^2} \int_{B_{3r} \setminus B_r} |x|^{\frac{8}{p-1}+4-n} \left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \right)^2 \\ &\leq C. \end{aligned}$$

The remaining terms in  $E(r)$  can be treated similarly.  $\square$

For any  $\lambda > 0$ , define

$$u^\lambda(x) := \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(\lambda x), \quad v^\lambda(x) := \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}+2} v(\lambda x).$$

$u^\lambda$  is also a smooth stable solution of (1.1) on  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

By rescaling (4.3), for all  $\lambda > 0$  and balls  $B_r(x) \subset \mathbb{R}^n$ ,

$$\int_{B_r(x)} (v^\lambda)^2 + |u^\lambda|^{p+1} \leq Cr^{n-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}}.$$

In particular,  $u^\lambda$  are uniformly bounded in  $L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . By elliptic estimates,  $u^\lambda$  are also uniformly bounded in  $W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . Hence, up to a subsequence of  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ , we can assume that  $u^\lambda \rightarrow u^\infty$  weakly in  $W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . By compactness embedding for Sobolev functions,  $u^\lambda \rightarrow u^\infty$  strongly in  $W_{loc}^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . Then for any ball  $B_R(0)$ , by interpolation between  $L^q$  spaces and noting (4.3), for any  $q \in [1, p+1)$ , as  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ ,

$$\|u^\lambda - u^\infty\|_{L^q(B_R(0))} \leq \|u^\lambda - u^\infty\|_{L^1(B_R(0))}^t \|u^\lambda - u^\infty\|_{L^{p+1}(B_R(0))}^{1-t} \rightarrow 0, \quad (4.4)$$

where  $t \in (0, 1)$  satisfies  $\frac{1}{q} = t + \frac{1-t}{p+1}$ . That is,  $u^\lambda \rightarrow u^\infty$  in  $L_{loc}^q(\mathbb{R}^n)$  for any  $q \in [1, p+1)$ .

For any function  $\varphi \in C_0^\infty(\mathbb{R}^n)$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \Delta u^\infty \Delta \varphi - (u^\infty)^p \varphi &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \Delta u^\lambda \Delta \varphi - (u^\lambda)^p \varphi = 0. \\ \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta \varphi)^2 - p(u^\infty)^{p-1} \varphi^2 &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta \varphi)^2 - p(u^\lambda)^{p-1} \varphi^2 \geq 0. \end{aligned}$$

Thus  $u^\infty \in W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$  is a stable solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

**Lemma 4.5.**  $u^\infty$  is homogeneous.

*Proof.* For any  $0 < r < R < +\infty$ , by the monotonicity of  $E(r; 0, u)$  and Lemma 4.4,

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} E(\lambda R; 0, u) - E(\lambda r; 0, u) = 0.$$

Then by the scaling invariance of  $E$  and applying Corollary 2.1, we see

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} E(R; 0, u^\lambda) - E(r; 0, u^\lambda) \\ &\geq c(n, p) \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_R \setminus B_r} \frac{\left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u^\lambda(x) + \frac{\partial u^\lambda}{\partial r}(x) \right)^2}{|x|^{n-2-\frac{8}{p-1}}} dx \\ &\geq c(n, p) \int_{B_R \setminus B_r} \frac{\left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u^\infty(x) + \frac{\partial u^\infty}{\partial r}(x) \right)^2}{|x|^{n-2-\frac{8}{p-1}}} dx. \end{aligned}$$

Note that in the last inequality we only used the weak convergence of  $u^\lambda$  to  $u^\infty$  in  $W_{loc}^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . Now

$$\frac{4}{p-1} r^{-1} u^\infty + \frac{\partial u^\infty}{\partial r} = 0, \text{ a.e. in } \mathbb{R}^n.$$

Integrating in  $r$  shows that

$$u^\infty(x) = |x|^{-\frac{4}{p-1}} u^\infty\left(\frac{x}{|x|}\right).$$

That is,  $u^\infty$  is homogeneous.  $\square$

By Theorem 3.1,  $u^\infty \equiv 0$ . Since this holds for the limit of any sequence  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ , by (4.4) we get

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} u^\lambda = 0 \quad \text{strongly in } L^2(B_4(0)).$$

Now we show

**Lemma 4.6.**  $\lim_{r \rightarrow +\infty} E(r; 0, u) = 0$ .

*Proof.* For all  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ ,

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_4(0)} (u^\lambda)^2 = 0.$$

Because  $v^\lambda$  are uniformly bounded in  $L^2(B_4(0))$ , by the Cauchy inequality we also have

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_4(0)} |u^\lambda v^\lambda| \leq \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \left( \int_{B_4(0)} (u^\lambda)^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \left( \int_{B_4(0)} (v^\lambda)^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} = 0.$$

By (4.2),

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_3(0)} (v^\lambda)^2 + |u^\lambda|^{p+1} &\leq C \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \left( \int_{B_4(0)} (u^\lambda)^2 + \int_{B_4(0)} |u^\lambda v^\lambda| \right) \\ &= 0. \end{aligned} \tag{4.5}$$

By the interior  $L^2$  estimate, we get

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_2(0)} \sum_{k \leq 2} |\nabla^k u^\lambda|^2 = 0.$$

In particular, we can choose a sequence  $\lambda_i \rightarrow +\infty$  such that

$$\int_{B_2(0)} \sum_{k \leq 2} |\nabla^k u^{\lambda_i}|^2 \leq 2^{-i}.$$

By this choice we have

$$\int_1^2 \sum_{i=1}^{+\infty} \int_{\partial B_r} \sum_{k \leq 2} |\nabla^k u^{\lambda_i}|^2 dr \leq \sum_{i=1}^{+\infty} \int_1^2 \int_{\partial B_r} \sum_{k \leq 2} |\nabla^k u^{\lambda_i}|^2 dr \leq 1.$$

That is, the function

$$f(r) := \sum_{i=1}^{+\infty} \int_{\partial B_r} \sum_{k \leq 2} |\nabla^k u^{\lambda_i}|^2 \in L^1((1, 2)).$$

There exists an  $r_0 \in (1, 2)$  such that  $f(r_0) < +\infty$ . From this we get

$$\lim_{i \rightarrow +\infty} \|u^{\lambda_i}\|_{W^{2,2}(\partial B_{r_0})} = 0.$$

Combining this with (4.5) and the scaling invariance of  $E(r)$ , we get

$$\lim_{i \rightarrow +\infty} E(\lambda_i r_0; 0, u) = \lim_{i \rightarrow +\infty} E(r_0; 0, u^{\lambda_i}) = 0.$$

Since  $\lambda_i r_0 \rightarrow +\infty$  and  $E(r; 0, u)$  is non-decreasing in  $r$ , we get

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} E(r; 0, u) = 0. \quad \square$$

By the smoothness of  $u$ ,  $\lim_{r \rightarrow 0} E(r; 0, u) = 0$ . Then again by the monotonicity of  $E(r; 0, u)$  and the previous lemma, we obtain

$$E(r; 0, u) = 0 \text{ for all } r > 0.$$

Then again by Corollary 2.1,  $u$  is homogeneous, and then  $u \equiv 0$  by Theorem 3.1 (or by the smoothness of  $u$ ). This finishes the proof of Theorem 4.1.

## 5. FINITE MORSE INDEX SOLUTIONS

In this section we prove Theorem 1.3. First, by the doubling lemma [25] and our Liouville theorem for stable solutions Theorem 4.1, we have

**Lemma 5.1.** *Let  $u$  be a finite Morse index (positive or sign changing) solution of (1.1). There exists a constant  $C_1$  and  $R_0$  such that for all  $x \in B_{R_0}(0)^c$ ,*

$$|u(x)| \leq C|x|^{-\frac{4}{p-1}}.$$

*Proof.* Assume that  $u$  is stable outside  $B_{R_0}$ . For  $x \in B_{R_0}^c$ , let  $M(x) = |u(x)|^{\frac{p-1}{4}}$  and  $d(x) = |x| - R_0$ , the distance to  $B_{R_0}$ . Assume that there exists a sequence of  $x_k \in B_{R_0}^c$  such that

$$M(x_k)d(x_k) \geq 2k. \quad (5.1)$$

Since  $u$  is bounded on any compact set of  $\mathbb{R}^n$ ,  $d(x_k) \rightarrow +\infty$ .

By the doubling lemma [25], there exists another sequence  $y_k \in B_{R_0}^c$ , such that

- (1)  $M(y_k)d(y_k) \geq 2k$ ;
- (2)  $M(y_k) \geq M(x_k)$ ;
- (3)  $M(z) \leq 2M(y_k)$  for any  $z \in B_{R_0}^c$  such that  $|z - y_k| \leq \frac{k}{M(y_k)}$ .

Now define

$$u_k(x) = M(y_k)^{-\frac{4}{p-1}} u(y_k + M(y_k)^{-1}x), \text{ for } x \in B_k(0).$$

By definition,  $|u_k(0)| = 1$ . By (3),  $|u_k| \leq 2^{\frac{p-1}{4}}$  in  $B_k(0)$ . By (1),  $B_{k/M(y_k)}(y_k) \cap B_{R_0} = \emptyset$ , which implies that  $u$  is stable in  $B_{k/M(y_k)}(y_k)$ . Hence  $u_k$  is stable in  $B_k(0)$ .

By elliptic regularity,  $u_k$  are uniformly bounded in  $C^5(B_k(0))$ . Up to a subsequence,  $u_k$  converges to  $u_\infty$  in  $C_{loc}^4(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . By the above conditions on  $u_k$ , we have

- (1)  $|u_\infty(0)| = 1$ ;
- (2)  $|u_\infty| \leq 2^{\frac{p-1}{4}}$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ ;
- (3)  $u_\infty$  is a smooth stable solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

By the Liouville theorem for stable solutions, Theorem 4.1,  $u_\infty \equiv 0$ . This is a contradiction, so (5.1) does not hold.  $\square$

**Corollary 5.2.** *There exists a constant  $C_1$  and  $R_0$  such that for all  $x \in B_{3R_0}(0)^c$ ,*

$$\sum_{k \leq 3} |x|^{\frac{4}{p-1}+k} |\nabla^k u(x)| \leq C_3. \quad (5.2)$$

*Proof.* For any  $x_0$  with  $|x_0| > 3R_0$ , take  $\lambda = \frac{|x_0|}{2}$  and define

$$\bar{u}(x) = \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(x_0 + \lambda x).$$

By the previous lemma,  $|\bar{u}| \leq C_1$  in  $B_1(0)$ . Standard elliptic estimates give

$$\sum_{k \leq 3} |\nabla^k \bar{u}(0)| \leq C_3.$$

Rescaling back we get (5.2).  $\square$

**Remark 5.3.** *By the same proof of Lemma 5.1 and Corollary 5.2, one easily obtains the second part of Theorem 1.7.*

**5.1. The subcritical case**  $1 < p < \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ . We use the following Pohozaev identity. For its proof, see [26, 27].

**Lemma 5.4.**

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{B_R} \frac{n-4}{2} (\Delta u)^2 - \frac{n}{p+1} |u|^{p+1} = \quad (5.3) \\ & \int_{\partial B_R} \frac{R}{2} (\Delta u)^2 + \frac{R}{p+1} |u|^{p+1} + R \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \frac{\partial \Delta u}{\partial r} - \Delta u \frac{\partial(x \cdot \nabla u)}{\partial r}. \end{aligned}$$

By taking  $R \rightarrow +\infty$  and using (5.2), and noting that  $p < \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ , we see that

$$\int_{\partial B_R} \frac{R}{2} (\Delta u)^2 + \frac{R}{p+1} |u|^{p+1} + R \frac{\partial u}{\partial r} \frac{\partial \Delta u}{\partial r} - \Delta u \frac{\partial(x \cdot \nabla u)}{\partial r} \rightarrow 0.$$

By (5.2), we also have

$$(\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq C(1 + |x|)^{-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}}.$$

Since  $p < \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ ,  $4\frac{p+1}{p-1} > n$ . Hence

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} < +\infty.$$

Taking limit in (5.3), we get

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \frac{n-4}{2} (\Delta u)^2 - \frac{n}{p+1} |u|^{p+1} = 0. \quad (5.4)$$

Take an  $\eta \in C_0^\infty(B_2)$ ,  $\eta \equiv 1$  in  $B_1$  and  $\sum_{k \leq 2} |\nabla^k \eta| \leq 1000$ , and denote  $\eta_R(x) = \eta(x/R)$ . By testing the equation (1.1) with  $u(x)\eta_R^2$ , we get

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta u)^2 \eta_R^2 - |u|^{p+1} \eta_R^2 = - \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} 2 \nabla u \nabla \eta_R^2 + u \Delta \eta_R^2.$$

By the same reasoning as above, we get

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta u)^2 - |u|^{p+1} = 0.$$

Substituting (5.4) into this, we get

$$\left( \frac{n-4}{2} - \frac{n}{p+1} \right) \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |u|^{p+1} = 0.$$

Since  $\frac{n-4}{2} - \frac{n}{p+1} < 0$ ,  $u \equiv 0$ .

**5.2. The critical case.** Since  $u$  is stable outside  $B_{R_0}$ , Lemma 4.2 still holds if the support of  $\eta$  is outside  $B_{R_0}$ . Take  $\varphi \in C_0^\infty(B_{2R} \setminus B_{2R_0})$ , such that  $\varphi \equiv 1$  in  $B_R \setminus B_{3R_0}$  and  $\sum_{k \leq 3} |x|^k |\nabla^k \varphi| \leq 100$ . Then by choosing  $\eta = \varphi^m$ , where  $m$  is large, in (4.1), and by the same reasoning to derive (4.3), we get

$$\int_{B_R \setminus B_{3R_0}} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq C.$$

Letting  $R \rightarrow +\infty$ , we get

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} < +\infty.$$

This then implies that

$$\lim_{R \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_{2R} \setminus B_R} R^{-1} |\nabla u| + R^{-2} |u| = 0.$$

Then we can proceed as in the subcritical case to prove that

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} (\Delta u)^2 - |u|^{p+1} = 0.$$

**5.3. The supercritical case.** Now we consider the case  $p > \frac{n+4}{n-4}$ .

**Lemma 5.5.** *There exists a constant  $C_2$ , such that for all  $r > 3R_0$ ,  $E(r; 0, u) \leq C_2$ .*

*Proof.* Expanding those boundary integrals in  $E(r; 0, u)$  into a full formulation involving the differentials of  $u$  up to third order, and substituting (5.2) into this formulation, we get

$$E(r; 0, u) \leq Cr^{\frac{4(p+1)}{p-1}-n} \left( \int_{B_r} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} \right) + Cr^{\frac{8}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_r} u^2$$



$$\begin{aligned}
& +Cr^{\frac{8}{p-1}+2-n} \int_{\partial B_r} |u| |\nabla u| + Cr^{\frac{8}{p-1}+3-n} \int_{\partial B_r} |\nabla u|^2 \\
& +Cr^{\frac{8}{p-1}+4-n} \int_{\partial B_r} |\nabla u| |\nabla^2 u| \\
& \leq C.
\end{aligned}$$

This constant only depends on the constant in (5.2).  $\square$

By Corollary 2.1, we get

**Corollary 5.6.**

$$\int_{B_{3R_0}^c} \frac{\left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u(x) + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r}(x) \right)^2}{|x|^{n-2-\frac{8}{p-1}}} dx < +\infty.$$

As in the proof for stable solutions, define the blowing down sequence

$$u^\lambda(x) = \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(\lambda x).$$

By Lemma 5.1,  $u^\lambda$  are uniformly bounded in  $C^5(B_r(0) \setminus B_{1/r}(0))$  for any fixed  $r > 1$ .  $u^\lambda$  is stable outside  $B_{R_0/\lambda}(0)$ . There exists a function  $u^\infty \in C^4(\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\})$ , such that up to a subsequence of  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ ,  $u^\lambda$  converges to  $u^\infty$  in  $C_{loc}^4(\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\})$ .  $u^\infty$  is a stable solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\}$ .

For any  $r > 1$ , by Corollary 5.6,

$$\begin{aligned}
& \int_{B_r \setminus B_{1/r}} \frac{\left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u^\infty(x) + \frac{\partial u^\infty}{\partial r}(x) \right)^2}{|x|^{n-2-\frac{8}{p-1}}} dx \\
& = \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_r \setminus B_{1/r}} \frac{\left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u^\lambda(x) + \frac{\partial u^\lambda}{\partial r}(x) \right)^2}{|x|^{n-2-\frac{8}{p-1}}} dx \\
& = \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_{\lambda r} \setminus B_{\lambda/r}} \frac{\left( \frac{4}{p-1} |x|^{-1} u(x) + \frac{\partial u}{\partial r}(x) \right)^2}{|x|^{n-2-\frac{8}{p-1}}} dx \\
& = 0.
\end{aligned}$$

Hence  $u^\infty$  is homogeneous, and by Theorem 3.1,  $u^\infty \equiv 0$ . This holds for every limit of  $u^\lambda$  as  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ , thus we have

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} |x|^{\frac{4}{p-1}} |u(x)| = 0.$$

Then as in the proof of Corollary 5.2, we get

**Lemma 5.7.**

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \sum_{k \leq 4} |x|^{\frac{4}{p-1}+k} |\nabla^k u(x)| = 0.$$

For any  $\varepsilon > 0$ , take an  $R$  such that for  $|x| > R$ ,

$$\sum_{k \leq 4} |x|^{\frac{4}{p-1}+k} |\nabla^k u(x)| \leq \varepsilon.$$

Then for  $r \gg R$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} E(r; 0, u) &\leq C r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_R(0)} [(\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1}] + C \varepsilon r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(0) \setminus B_R(0)} |x|^{-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \\ &\quad + C \varepsilon r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}+1-n} \int_{\partial B_r(0)} |x|^{-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \\ &\leq C(R) (r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} + \varepsilon). \end{aligned}$$

Since  $4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n < 0$  and  $\varepsilon$  can be arbitrarily small, we get  $\lim_{r \rightarrow +\infty} E(r; 0, u) = 0$ . Because  $\lim_{r \rightarrow 0} E(r; 0, u) = 0$  (by the smoothness of  $u$ ), the same argument for stable solutions implies that  $u \equiv 0$ .

**Remark 5.8.** *The monotonicity formula approach here is in some sense equivalent to the Pohozaev identity method (see for example [35]). The convergence of  $u^\lambda$  can also be seen by writing the equation in exponential polar coordinates.*

## 6. PARTIAL REGULARITY IN HIGH DIMENSIONS

Here we study the partial regularity for the extremal solution to the problem (1.9), and prove Theorems 1.6 and 1.9. Recall that we defined  $n_p$  to be the smallest dimension such that Theorem 3.1 does not hold. This is also the smallest dimension such that the Liouville theorem for stable solutions, Theorem 4.1, and the classification result for stable homogeneous solutions, Theorem 3.1, do not hold.

*Proof of Theorem 1.6.* For  $0 < \lambda < \lambda^*$  let  $u_\lambda > 0$  be the minimal solution of (1.9). We claim that

$$\sup_{\lambda \in (0, \lambda^*)} \|u_\lambda\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)} < +\infty. \quad (6.1)$$

Then by elliptic estimates, as  $\lambda \rightarrow \lambda^*$ ,  $u_\lambda$  are uniformly bounded in  $C^5(\overline{\Omega})$ . Because  $u_\lambda$  converges to  $u_{\lambda^*}$  pointwisely in  $\Omega$ ,  $u_{\lambda^*} \in C^4(\overline{\Omega})$ , and then we get  $u_{\lambda^*} \in C^\infty(\overline{\Omega})$  by bootstrapping elliptic estimates.

To prove (6.1), we use the classical blow up method of Gidas and Spruck. Let  $x_\lambda$  attain  $\max_{\overline{\Omega}} u_\lambda$ , and assume that

$$L_\lambda = u_\lambda(x_\lambda) + 1 \rightarrow +\infty.$$

By the maximum principle,  $x_\lambda \in \Omega$  is an interior point and

$$-\Delta u_\lambda > 0 \text{ in } \Omega. \quad (6.2)$$

Define

$$\bar{u}_\lambda = L_\lambda^{-1} \left( u_\lambda(x_\lambda + L_\lambda^{-\frac{p-1}{4}} x) + 1 \right) \text{ in } \Omega_\lambda,$$

where  $\Omega_\lambda = L_\lambda^{-\frac{p-1}{4}}(\Omega - x_\lambda)$ .  $\bar{u}_\lambda$  is a smooth stable solution of (1.1) in  $\Omega_\lambda$ , satisfying

$$\bar{u}_\lambda(0) = \max_{\overline{\Omega_\lambda}} \bar{u}_\lambda = 1, \quad (6.3)$$

and the boundary condition

$$\bar{u}_\lambda = L_\lambda^{-1}, \quad \Delta \bar{u}_\lambda = 0 \text{ on } \partial\Omega_\lambda.$$

From this, with the help of standard elliptic estimates, we see for any  $R > 0$ ,  $\bar{u}_\lambda$  are uniformly bounded in  $C^5(\Omega_\lambda \cap B_R(0))$ . By rescaling (6.2),

$$-\Delta \bar{u}_\lambda > 0 \text{ in } \Omega_\lambda. \quad (6.4)$$

Since  $\Omega$  is a smooth domain, as  $\lambda \rightarrow \lambda^*$ ,  $\Omega_\lambda$  either converges to  $\mathbb{R}^n$  or to a half space  $H$ . In the former case,  $\bar{u}_\lambda$  converges (up to a subsequence) to a limit  $\bar{u}$  in  $C_{loc}^4(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . Here  $\bar{u}$  is a positive, stable,  $C^4$  solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . Then by Theorem 4.1,  $\bar{u} \equiv 0$ . However, by passing to the limit in (6.3), we obtain

$$\bar{u}_\lambda(0) = 1.$$

This is a contradiction.

If  $\Omega_\lambda$  converges to a half space  $H = \{x_1 > -h\}$  for some  $h > 0$ ,  $\bar{u}_\lambda$  converges (up to a subsequence) to a limit  $\bar{u}$  in  $C_{loc}^4(\overline{H})$ . Here  $\bar{u}$  is a positive, stable,  $C^4$  solution of (1.1) in  $H$ , with the boundary conditions

$$\bar{u} = \Delta \bar{u} = 0 \text{ on } \partial H.$$

By taking limits in (6.3) and (6.4), we obtain

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta \bar{u} = \bar{v} > 0, & \text{in } H, \\ -\Delta \bar{v} = \bar{u}^p > 0, & \text{in } H, \\ \bar{u}(0) = \max_{\overline{H}} \bar{u} = 1. \end{cases}$$

By elliptic estimates, the last condition implies that  $\bar{v}$  is bounded in  $H$ . Then by [Theorem 2, [6]] or [Theorem 10, [31]],  $\frac{\partial \bar{u}}{\partial x_1} > 0$ ,  $\frac{\partial \bar{v}}{\partial x_1} > 0$ . Then the function  $w(y) = \lim_{x_1 \rightarrow +\infty} \bar{u}(x_1, y)$  exists for all  $y \in \mathbb{R}^{n-1}$  and

satisfies  $\Delta^2 w = w^p$  in  $\mathbb{R}^{n-1}$ . By the arguments in Section 3 of [35] this function  $w$  must be stable in  $\mathbb{R}^{n-1}$  and non trivial. By Theorem 1.3,  $p \geq p_c(n-1) \geq p_c(n)$ . This is impossible.

We conclude that  $\bar{u} \equiv 0$ , which is a contradiction. This finishes the proof of (6.1).  $\square$

The remaining part is devoted to the proof of Theorem 1.9. First we need the following lemma.

**Lemma 6.1.** *There exists a constant  $C$ , such that, for any ball  $B_{2r}(x) \subset \Omega$ ,*

$$r^{\frac{8p}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} (u_{\lambda^*} + 1)^{2p} \leq C r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{2r}(x)} (u_{\lambda^*} + 1)^{p+1} + (\Delta u_{\lambda^*})^2. \quad (6.5)$$

*Proof.* Denote  $w_\lambda = u_\lambda + 1$ . By the maximum principle and Lemma 3.2 in [3], for any  $\lambda \in (0, \lambda^*)$ ,

$$\Delta w_\lambda \leq -\sqrt{\frac{2\lambda}{p+1}} w_\lambda^{\frac{p+1}{2}} < 0 \text{ in } \Omega.$$

Since  $w_\lambda$  is smooth in  $\Omega$ , we can follow the proof in [35] to get Eq. (2.15) in [35]. That is, for any  $\eta \in C_0^\infty(\Omega)$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\Omega} w_\lambda^{2p} \eta^2 &\leq \int_{\Omega} -\Delta w_\lambda w_\lambda^p (|\nabla \eta|^2 + |\Delta \eta|^2) \\ &\quad + C \int_{\Omega} (\Delta w_\lambda)^2 [|\nabla \Delta \eta \nabla \eta| + |\Delta |\nabla \eta|^2| + |\Delta \eta|^2]. \end{aligned} \quad (6.6)$$

Take  $\varphi \in C_0^\infty(B_{2r}(x))$  such that  $0 \leq \varphi \leq 1$ ,  $\varphi \equiv 1$  in  $B_r(x)$  and

$$\sum_{k \leq 4} r^k |\nabla^k \varphi| \leq 1000.$$

Substituting  $\eta = \varphi^m$  into (6.6) with  $m$  larger, and then using Hölder inequality (exactly as in the derivation of Eq. (2.16) of [35]), we get (6.5) for  $u_\lambda$ .

This implies that  $u_\lambda$  are uniformly bounded in  $L_{loc}^{2p}(\Omega)$ . By the interior  $L^2$  estimate,  $u_\lambda$  are also uniformly bounded in  $W_{loc}^{4,2}(\Omega)$ . By the same proof of (4.4), as  $\lambda \rightarrow \lambda^*$ ,  $u_\lambda \rightarrow u_{\lambda^*}$  in  $W_{loc}^{3,2}(\Omega) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\Omega)$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned} r^{\frac{8p}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} (u_{\lambda^*} + 1)^{2p} &\leq \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow \lambda^*} r^{\frac{8p}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} (u_\lambda + 1)^{2p} \\ &\leq C \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow \lambda^*} r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{2r}(x)} (u_\lambda + 1)^{p+1} + (\Delta u_\lambda)^2 \end{aligned}$$

$$\leq C r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{2r}(x)} (u_{\lambda^*} + 1)^{p+1} + (\Delta u_{\lambda^*})^2.$$

Here we have used Fatou's lemma to deduce the first inequality.  $\square$

Below we denote  $u = u_{\lambda^*} + 1$ . Inequality (6.5) implies that

$$\int_{B_r(x)} u^{2p} \leq C r^{n-\frac{8p}{p-1}}. \quad (6.7)$$

for any ball  $B_r(x) \subset \Omega$ , with the constant  $C$  depending only on  $p$  and  $\Omega$ . See for example the derivation of Eq.(2.16) in [35]. Similarly,  $u$  also satisfies (4.3) for any ball  $B_R(x) \subset \Omega$ . Estimate (6.5) will play a crucial role in our proof of the  $\varepsilon$ -regularity lemma. Note that both (6.5) and (6.7) are invariant under the scaling for (1.1). Theses two are also preserved under various limits (The precise notion of limit will be given below).

To prove the partial regularity of  $u$ , first we need the following improvement of decay estimate.

**Lemma 6.2.** *There exist two universal constants  $\varepsilon_0 > 0$  and  $\theta \in (0, 1)$ , such that if  $u$  is a positive stable solution of (1.1) satisfying the estimate (6.5), and*

$$(2R)^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{2R}} u^{p+1} + (\Delta u)^2 = \varepsilon \leq \varepsilon_0.$$

Then

$$(\theta R)^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{\theta R}} u^{p+1} + (\Delta u)^2 \leq \frac{\varepsilon}{2}.$$

*Proof.* By rescaling, we can assume  $R = 1$ . By (6.5), we have

$$\int_{B_{3/2}} u^{2p} \leq C \int_{B_2} u^{p+1} + (\Delta u)^2 \leq C\varepsilon. \quad (6.8)$$

By  $L^2$  estimates applied to  $u$ ,

$$\|u\|_{W^{4,2}(B_{4/3})} \leq C \left( \|u^p\|_{L^2(B_{3/2})} + \|u\|_{L^2(B_{3/2})} \right) \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{p+1}}.$$

We can choose an  $r_0 \in (1, 4/3)$  so that

$$\|u\|_{W^{2,2}(\partial B_{r_0})} \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{p+1}}. \quad (6.9)$$

Now take the decomposition  $u = u_1 + u_2$ , where

$$\begin{cases} \Delta^2 u_1 = u^p, & \text{in } B_{r_0}, \\ u_1 = \Delta u_1 = 0, & \text{on } \partial B_{r_0}(0), \end{cases}$$

and

$$\begin{cases} \Delta^2 u_2 = 0, & \text{in } B_{r_0}, \\ u_2 = u, \Delta u_2 = \Delta u, & \text{on } \partial B_{r_0}(0). \end{cases}$$

By this decomposition,

$$\int_{B_{r_0}} \Delta u_1 \Delta u_2 = 0.$$

Hence

$$\int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u)^2 = \int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_1)^2 + \int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_2)^2.$$

In particular,

$$\int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_2)^2 \leq C\varepsilon. \quad (6.10)$$

By elliptic estimates for biharmonic functions and (6.9), we have

$$\sup_{B_{1/2}} |u_2| \leq C \left( \int_{\partial B_{r_0}} u^2 + (\Delta u)^2 \right)^{1/2} \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{p+1}}.$$

Since  $\Delta u_2$  is harmonic,  $(\Delta u_2)^2$  is subharmonic in  $B_{r_0}$ . By the mean value inequality for subharmonic functions and (6.10), for any  $r \in (0, r_0)$ ,

$$r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} (\Delta u_2)^2 \leq r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} r_0^{-n} \int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_2)^2 \leq C r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \varepsilon.$$

For  $u_1$ , first by the Green function representation (cf. Section 4.2 in [18]), we have

$$\|u_1\|_{L^1(B_{r_0})} \leq C \|u^p\|_{L^1(B_{r_0})} \leq C \left( \int_{B_2} u^{p+1} \right)^{\frac{p}{p+1}} \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{p}{p+1}}. \quad (6.11)$$

Then by  $L^2$  estimates using (6.7), we have

$$\|u_1\|_{W^{4,2}(B_{r_0})} \leq C (\|u^p\|_{L^2(B_{r_0})} + \|u_1\|_{L^1(B_{r_0})}) \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{2}}.$$

By Sobolev embedding theorem, we have

$$\|u_1\|_{L^{\frac{2n}{n-8}}(B_{r_0})} \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{2}}.$$

Then an interpolation between  $L^1$  and  $L^{\frac{2n}{n-8}}$  gives

$$\|u_1\|_{L^2(B_{r_0})} \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{2}+2\delta},$$

where  $\delta > 0$  is a constant depending only the dimension  $n$ .

Next, by interpolation between Sobolev spaces, we get

$$\|\Delta u_1\|_{L^2(B_{r_0})} \leq \varepsilon^{-\delta} \|u_1\|_{L^2(B_{r_0})} + C\varepsilon^{\delta} \|\Delta^2 u_1\|_{L^2(B_{r_0})} \leq C\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{2}+\delta}.$$

Multiplying the equation of  $u_1$  by  $u_1$  and integrate by parts, we get

$$\int_{B_{r_0}} u^p u_1 = \int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_1)^2 \leq C\varepsilon^{1+2\delta}.$$

By convexity, there exists a constant depending only on  $p$  such that

$$u^{p+1} \leq C(u_1^{p+1} + u_2^{p+1}).$$

For  $r \in (0, 1/2)$ , which will be determined below,

$$\begin{aligned} r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} u^{p+1} &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} u_1^{p+1} + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} u_2^{p+1} \\ &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} (u + u_2)^p u_1 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \sup_{B_r} |u_2|^{p+1} \\ &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} u^p u_1 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} \varepsilon^{\frac{p}{p+1}} u_1 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \varepsilon \\ &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{r_0}} u^p u_1 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{r_0}} \varepsilon^{\frac{p}{p+1}} u_1 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \varepsilon \\ &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{1+2\delta} + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{\frac{2p}{p+1}} + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \varepsilon. \end{aligned}$$

For  $(\Delta u)^2$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} (\Delta u)^2 &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} (\Delta u_1)^2 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} (\Delta u_2)^2 \\ &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_1)^2 + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} r_0^{-n} \int_{B_{r_0}} (\Delta u_2)^2 \\ &\leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{1+2\delta} + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \varepsilon. \end{aligned}$$

Putting these two together, we get

$$r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r} (\Delta u)^2 + u^{p+1} \leq Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{1+2\delta} + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{\frac{2p}{p+1}} + Cr^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \varepsilon.$$

We first choose  $r = \theta \in (0, 1/2)$  so that

$$C\theta^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \leq \frac{1}{4}.$$

Then choose an  $\varepsilon_0$  so that for every  $\varepsilon \in (0, \varepsilon_0)$ ,

$$C\theta^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{1+2\delta} + C\theta^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \varepsilon^{\frac{2p}{p+1}} \leq \frac{1}{4} \varepsilon.$$

By this choice we finish the proof.  $\square$

**Remark 6.3.** Lemma 6.2 also holds for a sign-changing solution  $u$  of (1.1) if it satisfies

$$r^{\frac{8p}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} |u|^{2p} \leq C r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{2r}(x)} |u|^{p+1} + (\Delta u)^2, \quad (6.12)$$

for any ball  $B_{2r}(x) \subset \Omega$ . For the proof, we need to introduce a new function  $\bar{u}_1$ , which satisfies

$$\begin{cases} \Delta^2 \bar{u}_1 = |u|^p, & \text{in } B_{r_0}, \\ \bar{u}_1 = \Delta \bar{u}_1 = 0, & \text{on } \partial B_{r_0}(0), \end{cases}$$

By the maximum principle,  $\bar{u}_1 \geq |u_1| \geq 0$ . By the same method for  $u_1$ , we have

$$\int_{B_{r_0}} |u|^p \bar{u}_1 \leq C \varepsilon^{1+2\delta}.$$

We can use this to control  $|u|^p |u_1|$ .

**Lemma 6.4.** There exists a universal constant  $\varepsilon^* > 0$  and  $\theta \in (0, 1)$ , such that if  $u$  is a stable solution of (1.1) satisfying (6.12), and

$$(2R)^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} = \varepsilon \leq \varepsilon_0,$$

then  $u$  is smooth in  $B_R$ , and there exists a universal constant  $C(\varepsilon_0)$  such that

$$\sup_{B_R(x_0)} |u| \leq C(\varepsilon^*) R^{-\frac{4}{p-1}}.$$

*Proof.* By choosing a smaller  $\varepsilon^*$ , we can apply Lemma 6.2 to any ball  $B_r(x)$  with  $x \in B_R(x_0)$  and  $r \leq R/4$ , which says

$$(\theta r)^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_{\theta r}(x)} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq \frac{1}{2} r^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_r(x)} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1}$$

iterating the above implies

$$\int_{B_r(x)} (\Delta u)^2 + |u|^{p+1} \leq C r^{n-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}+\delta}$$

for any  $x \in B_1$  and  $r \leq 1/8$ . Here  $\delta > 0$  is a constant depending only on  $\varepsilon_0$  and  $\theta$  in Lemma 6.2. In other words,  $u$  belongs to the homogeneous Morrey space  $L^{p+1, n+\delta-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}}(B_1)$ . Then the Morrey space estimate for biharmonic operator gives the claim, see the appendix.  $\square$

Together with a covering argument, this lemma gives a bound on the Hausdorff dimension of the singular set of  $u(= u_{\lambda^*} + 1)$

$$\dim \mathcal{S} \leq n - 4\frac{p+1}{p-1}.$$



In particular,  $u$  is smooth on an open dense set.

For any  $x_0 \in \Omega$  and  $\lambda \in (0, 1)$ , define the blowing up sequence

$$u^\lambda(x) = \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(x_0 + \lambda x), \quad \lambda \rightarrow 0,$$

which is also a stable solution of (1.1) in the ball  $B_{1/\lambda}(0)$ .

By rescaling (6.7), for all  $\lambda \in (0, 1)$  and balls  $B_r(x) \subset B_{1/\lambda}$ ,

$$\int_{B_r(x)} (u^\lambda)^{2p} \leq C r^{n - \frac{8p}{p-1}}.$$

By elliptic estimates,  $u^\lambda$  is uniformly bounded in  $W_{loc}^{4,2}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . Hence, up to a subsequence of  $\lambda \rightarrow 0$ , we can assume that  $u^\lambda \rightarrow u^0$  in  $W_{loc}^{3,2}(\mathbb{R}^n)$  and  $L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$  (by the same proof of (4.4)). By testing the equation for  $u^\lambda$  (or the stability condition for  $u^\lambda$ ) with smooth functions having compact support, and then taking the limit  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$ , we see  $u^0$  is a stable solution of (1.1) in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

We have

**Lemma 6.5.** *For any  $r > 0$ ,  $E(r; 0, u^0) = \lim_{r \rightarrow 0} E(r; 0, u)$ . So  $u^0$  is homogeneous.*

*Proof.* A direct rescaling shows  $E(r; 0, u^\lambda) = E(\lambda r; x_0, u)$ . By the monotonicity of  $E(r; x_0, u)$ , we only need to show that, for every  $r > 0$ ,

$$E(r; 0, u^0) = \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 0} E(r; 0, u^\lambda).$$

Because  $u^\lambda$  is uniformly bounded in  $W^{4,2}(B_r)$  and  $L^{2p}(B_r)$ , by the compactness results in Sobolev embedding theorems and trace theorems, and interpolation between  $L^q$  spaces (see (4.4)), we have

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_r} (\Delta u^\lambda)^2 &= \int_{B_r} (\Delta u^0)^2. \\ \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{B_r} (u^\lambda)^{p+1} &= \int_{B_r} (u^0)^{p+1}. \\ u^\lambda &\rightarrow u^0 \text{ in } W^{2,2}(\partial B_r). \end{aligned}$$

The last claim implies those boundary terms in  $E(r; 0, u^\lambda)$  converges to the corresponding ones in  $E(r; 0, u^0)$ . Putting these together we get the convergence of  $E(r; 0, u^\lambda)$ .

Since for any  $r > 0$ ,  $E(r; 0, u^0) = \text{const.}$ , by Corollary 2.1,  $u^0$  is homogeneous.  $\square$

Here we note that since  $u$  satisfies (4.3) for any ball  $B_R(x) \subset \Omega$ , so by the same argument as in the proof of Lemma 4.4, we can prove that

$E(r; x, u)$  is uniformly bounded for all  $x$  and  $r \in (0, 1)$ . Since  $E(r; x, u)$  is non-decreasing in  $r$ , we can define the density function

$$\Theta(x, u) := \lim_{r \rightarrow 0} E(r; x, u).$$

**Lemma 6.6.** (1)  $\Theta(x, u)$  is upper semi-continuous in  $x$ ;  
 (2) for all  $x$ ,  $\Theta(x, u) \geq 0$ ;  
 (3)  $x$  is a regular point of  $u$  if and only  $\Theta(x, u) = 0$ ;  
 (4) there exists a universal constant  $\varepsilon_0 > 0$ ,  $x \in S(u)$  if and only if  $\Theta(x, u) \geq \varepsilon_0$ .

*Proof.* By the  $W^{4,2}$  regularity of  $u$ , for any  $r > 0$  fixed,  $E(r; x, u)$  is continuous in  $x$ .  $\Theta(x, u)$  is the decreasing limit of these continuous functions, thus is upper semi-continuous in  $x$ .

If  $u$  is smooth in a neighborhood of  $x$ , direct calculation shows  $\Theta(x, u) = 0$ . Since regular points form a dense set, the upper semi-continuity of  $\Theta$  gives  $\Theta \geq 0$ .

By Lemma 6.4, if  $x$  is a singular point, for any  $r > 0$ ,

$$\int_{B_r(x)} (\Delta u)^2 + u^{p+1} \geq \varepsilon_0 r^{n-4\frac{p+1}{p-1}}.$$

In other words, for any  $\lambda > 0$ , for the blowing up sequence  $u^\lambda$  at  $x_0$ ,

$$\int_{B_1(0)} (\Delta u^\lambda)^2 + (u^\lambda)^{p+1} \geq \varepsilon_0.$$

Then because  $u^\lambda \rightarrow u^0$  in  $W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$  (see the proof of Lemma 6.5),

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{B_1(0)} (\Delta u^0)^2 + (u^0)^{p+1} &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 0} \int_{B_1(0)} (\Delta u^\lambda)^2 + (u^\lambda)^{p+1} \\ &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 0} \lambda^{-n+4\frac{p+1}{p-1}} \int_{B_\lambda(0)} (\Delta u)^2 + (u)^{p+1} \geq \varepsilon_0. \end{aligned}$$

Hence  $u^0$  is nontrivial, and by Remark 3.2 and Lemma 6.5,

$$\Theta(x, u) = E(1; 0, u^0) \geq c(n, p)\varepsilon_0.$$

Here  $c(n, p)$  is a constant depending only on  $p$  and  $n$ .

On the other hand, if  $\Theta(x, u) < c(n, p)\varepsilon_0$ , then by Remark 3.2, for any blow up limit  $u^0$  at  $x$ ,

$$\int_{B_1(0)} (\Delta u^0)^2 + (u^0)^{p+1} < \varepsilon_0.$$

Then by the convergence of  $u^\lambda$  in  $W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ , for  $\lambda$  sufficiently small,

$$\lambda^{4\frac{p+1}{p-1}-n} \int_{B_\lambda(x)} (\Delta u)^2 + u^{p+1} = \int_{B_1(0)} (\Delta u^\lambda)^2 + (u^\lambda)^{p+1} \leq \varepsilon_0.$$

By Lemma 6.4,  $u$  is smooth in  $B_{\lambda/2}(x)$ . Consequently,  $\Theta(x, u) = 0$ . These finish the proof of the last two claims.  $\square$

**Remark 6.7.** If  $\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 0} u^\lambda = u^0$  in some sense (for example, as in the above blowing up sequence) so that for any  $x$  and  $r > 0$ ,  $\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 0} E(r; x, u^\lambda) = E(r; x, u^0)$ , then

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow 0} \Theta(x, u^\lambda) \leq \Theta(x, u^0).$$

That is,  $\Theta(x; u)$  is also upper semi-continuous in  $u$ .

**Lemma 6.8.** Let  $u \in W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$  be a homogeneous stable solution of (1.1) on  $\mathbb{R}^n$ , satisfying the monotonicity formula and the integral estimate (6.7), then for any  $x \neq 0$ ,  $\Theta(x, u) \leq \Theta(0, u)$ . Moreover, if  $\Theta(x, u) = \Theta(0, u)$ ,  $u$  is translation invariant in the direction  $x$ , i.e. for all  $t \in \mathbb{R}$ ,

$$u(tx + \cdot) = u(\cdot) \text{ a.e. in } \mathbb{R}^n.$$

*Proof.* With the help of the integral estimate (6.7), similar to Lemma 4.4, for any  $x_0 \in \mathbb{R}^n$ ,

$$\lim_{r \rightarrow +\infty} E(r; x_0, u) \leq C.$$

And we can define the blowing down sequence with respect to the base point  $x_0$ ,

$$u^\lambda(x) = \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(x_0 + \lambda x) \quad \lambda \rightarrow +\infty.$$

Since  $u$  is homogeneous with respect to 0,

$$u^\lambda(x) = u(\lambda^{-1}x_0 + x),$$

which converges to  $u(x)$  as  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$  in  $W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n) \cap L_{loc}^{p+1}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ . Then Lemma 6.5 can be applied to deduce that

$$\begin{aligned} \Theta(0; u) = E(1; 0, u) &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} E(1; 0, u^\lambda) \\ &= \lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} E(\lambda; x_0, u) \\ &\geq \Theta(x_0; u). \end{aligned}$$

Moreover, if  $\Theta(x_0; u) = \Theta(0, u)$ , the above inequality become an equality:

$$\lim_{\lambda \rightarrow +\infty} E(\lambda; x_0, u) = \Theta(x_0; u).$$

This then implies that  $E(\lambda; x_0, u) \equiv \Theta(x_0; u)$  for all  $\lambda > 0$ . By Corollary 2.1,  $u$  is homogeneous with respect to  $x_0$ . Then for all  $\lambda > 0$ ,

$$u(x_0 + x) = \lambda^{\frac{4}{p-1}} u(x_0 + \lambda x) = u(\lambda^{-1} x_0 + x).$$

By letting  $\lambda \rightarrow +\infty$  and noting that  $u(\lambda^{-1} x_0 + \cdot)$  are uniformly bounded in  $W_{loc}^{2,2}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ , we see

$$u(x_0 + \cdot) = u(\cdot) \text{ a.e. on } \mathbb{R}^n.$$

Because  $u$  is homogeneous with respect to 0, a direct scaling shows that  $\Theta(tx_0; u) = \Theta(x_0; u)$  for all  $t > 0$ , so the above equality still holds if we replace  $x_0$  by  $tx_0$  for any  $t > 0$ . A change of variable shows this also holds if  $t < 0$ .  $\square$

With this lemma in hand we can apply the Federer's dimension reduction principle (cf. Appendix A in [30]) to deduce Theorem 1.9.

#### APPENDIX A. PROOF OF ESTIMATE IN LEMMA 6.4

Let us use the notation

$$\|f\|_{q,\gamma,\Omega} = \sup_{x,r} \left( r^{-\gamma} \int_{B(x,r) \cap \Omega} |f|^q \right)^{1/q}$$

$$L^{q,\gamma}(\Omega) = \{u \in L^q(\Omega) : \|u\|_{q,\gamma,\Omega} < \infty\},$$

where  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n$  is a bounded domain,  $0 < \gamma \leq n$ ,  $1 \leq q < \infty$ .

For completeness we give a proof of the following result, which is an adaptation of [22, 23].

**Lemma A.1.** *Assume  $u$  is a weak solution of*

$$\Delta^2 u = |u|^{p-1} u \quad \text{in } B_1(0)$$

*and  $u \in L^{p,n-4\frac{p}{p-1}+\delta}(B_1(0))$  for some  $\delta > 0$ . Then  $u$  is bounded in  $B_{1/2}(0)$ .*

We need some preliminaries. Let

$$I_\alpha(f)(x) = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} |x-y|^{-n+\alpha} f(y) dy$$

**Lemma A.2.** ([22, Lemma 1]) *If  $f \in L^{1,\gamma}(\mathbb{R}^n)$ ,  $0 < \epsilon < \gamma$  and  $1 < p < \frac{n-\epsilon}{n-\epsilon-\alpha}$  then*

$$\int_{\Omega} |I_\alpha(f)|^p(x) dx \leq C \text{diam}(\Omega)^{n-\epsilon-(n-\alpha-\epsilon)p} \int_{\Omega} |f| dx \quad (\text{A.1})$$

**Lemma A.3.** (Campanato [1]) Let  $0 < \gamma < n$  and  $c > 0$ . Assume  $\phi : (0, R] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is a nonnegative nondecreasing function such that

$$\phi(\rho) \leq c \left( \frac{\rho^n}{r^n} \phi(r) + r^\gamma \right) \quad \text{for all } 0 < \rho \leq r \leq R.$$

Then there is  $C$  depending only on  $n, \gamma, c$  such that

$$\phi(\rho) \leq C \rho^\gamma \left( \frac{\phi(r)}{r^\gamma} + 1 \right) \quad \text{for all } 0 < \rho \leq r \leq R.$$

**Lemma A.4.** Let  $v$  satisfy  $\Delta^2 v = 0$  in  $B_R(0)$ . Then there is  $C$  such that

$$|v(x)| \leq \frac{C}{R^n} \int_{B_R(0)} |v| dy \quad \text{for all } |x| \leq \frac{1}{2}R. \quad (\text{A.2})$$

*Proof.* By scaling we can restrict to  $R = 1$  and  $v \in C^4(\overline{B_1}(0))$ . Let  $\eta \in C^\infty(\mathbb{R}^n)$  be a cut-off function with  $\eta(x) = 1$  of  $|x| \geq \frac{1}{4}$  and  $\eta(x) = 0$  for  $|x| \leq \frac{1}{8}$ . Let  $\Gamma(x) = c_n |x|^{n-4}$  be the fundamental solution of  $\Delta^2$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ ,  $c_n > 0$ . Then

$$v(x) = \int_{B_1} v(y) \Delta^2(\Gamma(x-y)\eta(x-y)) dy \quad \text{for } |x| \leq \frac{1}{2}$$

and (A.2) follows.  $\square$

*Proof of Lemma A.1.* Let  $R_1 < 1$  (close to 1),  $|x| < R_1$  and  $0 < r < \frac{1-R_1}{2}$ . Let  $u_1 = \Gamma * (|u|^{p-1} u \chi_{B_r(x)})$  where  $\Gamma(x) = c_n |x|^{n-4}$  is the fundamental solution of  $\Delta^2$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ ,  $c_n > 0$ , and  $\chi_{B_r(x)}$  is the indicator function of  $B_r(x)$ . Let  $u_2 = u - u_1$ . Then  $\Delta^2 u_2 = 0$  in  $B_r(x)$ . By (A.2)

$$|u_2(z)| \leq \frac{C}{r^n} \int_{B_r(x)} |u_2| \quad \text{for } z \in B_{r/2}(x).$$

Let  $y \in B_{r/2}(x)$  and  $0 < \rho < \frac{r}{2}$ . Integrating in  $B_\rho(y)$  and using Hölder's inequality

$$\int_{B_\rho(y)} |u_2|^p \leq C \left( \frac{\rho}{r} \right)^n \int_{B_r(x)} |u_2|^p.$$

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{B_\rho(y)} |u|^p &\leq C \int_{B_\rho(y)} |u_1|^p + C \left( \frac{\rho}{r} \right)^n \int_{B_r(x)} |u_2|^p \\ &\leq C \left( \frac{\rho}{r} \right)^n \int_{B_r(x)} |u|^p + C \int_{B_r(x)} |u_1|^p. \end{aligned} \quad (\text{A.3})$$

Let  $\gamma_0 = n - 4\frac{p}{p-1} + \delta$ . Using (A.1) with  $\alpha = 4$ ,  $\gamma = \gamma_0$  and  $\epsilon$  a number such that  $n - 4\frac{p}{p-1} < \epsilon < \gamma_0$  we have

$$\int_{B_r(x)} |u_1|^p \leq Cr^{n-\epsilon-(n-4-\epsilon)p} \int_{B_r(x)} |u|^p.$$

Then, combining with (A.3) we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{B_\rho(y)} |u|^p &\leq C\left(\frac{\rho}{r}\right)^n \int_{B_r(x)} |u|^p + Cr^{n-\epsilon-(n-4-\epsilon)p} \int_{B_r(x)} |u|^p \\ &\leq C\left(\frac{\rho}{r}\right)^n \int_{B_r(x)} |u|^p + Cr^{n-\epsilon-(n-4-\epsilon)p+\gamma_0} \end{aligned}$$

for any  $y \in B_{r/2}(x)$ ,  $0 < \rho < \frac{r}{2}$ . We have the validity of the inequality for  $0 < \rho \leq r$ , possibly increasing  $C$ . Using the Lemma of Campanato (Lemma A.3),

$$\int_{B_\rho(y)} |u|^p \leq C\rho^{n-\epsilon-(n-4-\epsilon)p+\gamma_0}$$

for  $0 < \rho \leq r$ , which shows that  $u \in L^{p,\gamma_1}(B_{R_1})$  where  $R_1 < 1$  can be chosen arbitrarily close to 1, and  $\gamma_1 = n - \epsilon - (n - 4 - \epsilon)p + \gamma_0$  can be chosen arbitrarily close to  $n(1 - p) + 4p + \gamma_0$ . In particular we can choose  $\gamma_1 > \gamma_0$ . Repeating the process, we can find a decreasing sequence  $R_i \rightarrow \frac{4}{5}$  and an increasing sequence  $\gamma_i \rightarrow n - 4$  such that  $u \in L^{p,\gamma_i}(B_{R_i})$ . Then by Lemma A.1  $u \in L^q(B_{3/4}(0))$  for all  $q > 1$  and by standard elliptic regularity  $u \in L^\infty(B_{1/2})$ .  $\square$

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